

SERMON FOR THE CATHOLIC UNION SUMMER GATHERING
held at St Augustine's Priory Ealing on 6th July 2013

[The Gospel was taken from the Common of Martyrs : John XV 18-21 : No 6 page 1470 in the Lectionary volume II)

In the Gospel you have just heard there is a challenge to you. Should the Catholic Union abandon its aims and objects and look for some haven where it could escape from the problems and debates, the organisations and responsibilities of public life and enjoy a common good without difficulty in a utopian world – perhaps like that imagined by St Thomas More in his book “Utopia”. But let me remind that the very title of the book announces that this is a place which does not exist; it is “A No Place”.

However today's Gospel does seem to suggest that we should abandon public life, the common good and this world. Because the Lord's disciple does not belong to the world, “because [God's] choice withdrew you from the world, therefore the world hates you”. (John XV 19) You, my dear Sisters and Brothers, do not belong to the world. You have not been hired by the world, to serve selfish and greedy purposes. The created world belongs to the Lord from whom wicked men have stolen it. They are stewards who, while the Master is away, have fallen to beating his fellow servants, and eating and drinking with drunkards, living dissolute lives financed by stolen goods.

You belong to Jesus Christ who has purchased you at the price of his precious blood. So he has withdrawn you from the world's sale room as it were, only to send you back to the world as stewards to share in the redemption of the world that is his creation, the vineyard that he has created.

There is also an obvious reflection on our Gospel reading to be found in the Beatitudes. “Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are you when people abuse and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great on heaven”. (Matt V 11)

There is an interpretation to be found in the words of St Thomas More, the words in which he summarised his own life. It is said that the lives of the saints are the best interpreters of the Scriptures. Their lives are a practical commentary on the Bible. Did not St Thomas More say, “I am the King’s good servant, but God’s first”. That is his interpretation of our reading.

The world is not evil. It is worldly people who have no vision beyond this temporal and material life, and who simply see stewardship as looking after their own material benefits, who give the world a bad name, so that the word “world” has become synonymous with evil living. Jesus has come into the world, which had its beginning through him, the world that did not know him, when “he came to this own domain and his own people did not accept him”. (John I 11) This world that belongs to God and of which we are stewards, has been stolen by some stewards, who have made it their own, using it for their profits and not those of the Master.

You, my dear members of the Catholic Union of Great Britain are required to be good stewards who never relinquish your participation in public life.

Let me quote from Blessed John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*. It says to you as the lay faithful of Christ, what I, the Church and indeed the Lord Jesus himself want to say to you,

“In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in public life, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.” (Section 42)

This applies to us all, because public life is for everyone and by everyone; and all of us, each and everyone benefit from it. And what is more everyone should not only benefit from the common good but also contribute to it. In this world we are all stewards of the common good. The command of the Lord, “You go into my vineyard too” is addressed to every person who comes into this world. So says JPII at the beginning of *“Christifidels Laici”*. (Section 2)